

SPEECH

OF

MR. R. W. THOMPSON, OF INDIANA,

MADE DURING THE DEBATE

ON THE BILL

TO SUPPLY THE DEFICIENCY OF APPROPRIATIONS

FOR THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1848.

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE U. S.,
MARCH 2, 1848.

WASHINGTON:

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1848.

THOMSON

MR. R. W. THOMSON, OF INDIANA

STATE HOUSE, INDIANAPOLIS

OF THE STATE

TO SUBMIT THE PROPOSITIONS

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WASHINGTON

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1878

SPEECH.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union, and having under consideration the Bill to supply the deficiency of appropriations for the year ending June 30, 1848:

Mr. R. W. THOMPSON, of Indiana, addressed the Committee as follows

Mr. CHAIRMAN: Nothing was farther from my wish or design than to make a speech pending the consideration of this bill; nor should I now do so, were it not rendered necessary by what was said on yesterday by the gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. McLANE.) That gentleman's remarks had so direct a reference to me, that if I pass them by without notice it may be supposed that I intend to treat him uncourteously. Nothing is farther from my wish.

The gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. McLANE,) seemed to think that I was his rival on this floor; I understood him to say that it had been so asserted in the Baltimore district. I claim to be neither the rival of the gentleman from Maryland, nor of any other member of this House, nor to be the especial defender of the truth of history. I profess to be only a plain man, the representative of a plain people, of whom I am proud, and who have confided to my hands a trust which I shall endeavor to perform truly and faithfully. They have charged me with a participation in the duties of this House, and I assure the gentleman that, without reference to the superiority of any one member here over another, I shall discharge those duties with a just and full sense of all my responsibilities. I came here, not to enter the field of gladiatorial combat with the gentleman from Maryland, nor any other member of the House, nor to shrink from the task of defending my position, or the interest of those who sent me, or to defend the truth of history, whenever, in my own judgment, it became necessary and proper. The people of my district knew full well, before I came, of the desire on my part to exercise, so far as I could, every possible degree of instrumentality to bring the Government back to the true principles of the Constitution, and to terminate successfully, speedily, and honorably, the present unnecessary war, into which the country had been unconstitutionally plunged by an ambitious and imbecile Executive. These duties I trust I shall perform in a manner becoming to myself as an individual and as a member of this House.

The gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. McLANE,) had also told the committee that I was, in the Baltimore district, supposed to be his rival, not only in those things which were understood to be essential to a public debater, but was also his rival in *personal beauty*! With the most modest and becoming pretensions to personal comeliness, I will say to the gentleman that in that, too, my position is wholly misconceived. For my own part, I cannot imagine how by possibility the personal appearance either of the gentleman or myself can have any relation to public questions pending before this House, unless it be, that in the district represented by the gentleman the personal appearance of a member of Congress is deemed to be of the greatest importance. If such is the fact, I now frankly and willingly yield the palm to the gentleman; and if hereafter a doubt should any where exist whether the gentleman or myself is the *handsomest man*, I desire the question to be forever settled that the gentleman from

Maryland is, without dispute, the best looking man in the present Congress. [Laughter.]

I shall now proceed briefly to notice what the gentleman from Maryland has called the issue of fact between us. I trust the gentleman does not regard it as a question of veracity, for, as I understand it, it is simply one of construction, involving merely the interpretation of certain language. In the meaning to be attached to this language, the gentleman and myself have differed, and that difference has led to this debate. I think that before I close I shall be able to convince the committee, and perhaps the gentleman himself, that all the material parts of my speech, to which he on yesterday attempted a reply, so far from being weakened by that reply, are fortified and strengthened; and I think I shall also be able to show that the gentleman has in fact replied to his own speech, heretofore made, and has refuted some of the main positions he has there taken.

What was the original point of controversy to which the gentleman returned on yesterday? In the speech to which my former one was a reply, it had been asserted that it was communicated to Congress in December, 1845, that General Taylor had been "assigned to the defence of the country west to the Rio Grande." I have said, and I shall now repeat it, although not at all necessary to my present design, that no such communication had been made to Congress. I then showed, by reference to the President's message of December, 1845, that the President did not communicate it; that he merely informed Congress that General Taylor had been ordered to take position *between* the Nueces and the Rio Grande, and that every body knew at that time that the point occupied by him was Corpus Christi. No where was it said by the President that General Taylor had been ordered to the Rio Grande, or to *defend* the Rio Grande, or to maintain it as the boundary of Texas. But, that the Administration might have the full benefit of the admission, if it were, in fact, an admission at all, I further stated that the Secretary of War, in his communication to Congress in December, 1845, did avow that his *ultimate purpose* was the defence of the territory of the Rio Grande, and the maintenance of that river as the boundary of Texas. I did not then pretend to quote the words of the Secretary of War; I merely undertook to state the substance of his report upon that particular point, and to show that even the Secretary had informed Congress of no such fact as that General Taylor had *at that time* been "assigned to the defence of the country west to the Rio Grande." The gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. McLANE,) did, however, on yesterday insist that I was guilty of both the sin of omission and of commission in misstating some portion of the history of these events, and in failing to state other portions of it; and, in order to make good his charge, he found it necessary to assert that the Secretary of War *did not* report to Congress, as I had admitted—which admission I made with the sole view that I should do no injustice to the Administration. Now, it was not important to my original argument, nor is it now important to me, whether the Secretary so reported or not; for if he did *not* so report, and the President did *not* so report, then Congress was not informed, as the gentleman had asserted, that General Taylor had been "assigned to the defence of the Rio Grande." Does not the gentleman see, therefore, that his argument of yesterday is a complete refutation of that made in his original speech, and that while he has insisted in the one that this information *was* given to Congress, he has insisted in the other that it *was not*? He will find it difficult to extricate himself from this contradiction of *himself*.

I conceived it to be important to know whether or not, at the session in December, 1845, Congress had knowledge of the fact that General Taylor had been ordered to advance the army to the valley of the Rio Grande, or whether or not the President designed to give such order. This is one of the ques-

tions of the present controversy, and I do not hesitate to repeat what I heretofore said—that no such order was made known to Congress and the country, and that, if such an order were then contemplated, it was known only to the Executive and those to whom his secrets were confided.

Mr. McLANE desired to explain, and said that the gentleman from Indiana, (Mr. THOMPSON,) in his original speech, had undertaken to controvert the point that Gen. Taylor was assigned to a position for the defence of the territory west to the Rio Grande; but that he now undertook to answer a position which he (Mr. McL.) had not taken, which was, that the President had ordered General Taylor to the Rio Grande.

Mr. THOMPSON. I will explain the gentleman's true position by reference to his first speech, and insist that he shall abide by what he there avowed. In that speech the gentleman has argued that the act of Congress admitting Texas into the Union, and consummating annexation, had adopted the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas, because it had been communicated to Congress, before that act was passed, that Gen. Taylor was "destined to defend and protect the soil of Texas," the "western frontier" of which was the Rio Grande. How did the gentleman reach this conclusion? Was it by merely setting up the claim to the Rio Grande, with the purpose of *ultimately* pressing it to consummation, that we were to derive title? If the claim were a good one, why had it not been asserted at once and without delay? If the Rio Grande was the "western frontier" of Texas, why had Gen. Taylor been sent only to the Nueces, when the avowed object of the Government was the protection of that frontier? Did not the gentleman see that the annunciation of the design, whether by the President or Secretary of War, of *ultimately* going to the Rio Grande, could have no reference whatsoever to any legislation predicated upon the then existing state of things, and which was had before any attempt was made to carry that design into execution? But the force of the gentleman's answer to this is, that the legislation of Congress adopted the intention of the Executive, and made it a part of the law of the land. Why, sir, there is no sort of justification for such a process of reasoning; if, indeed, it can be called reasoning at all. The President, through the Secretary of War, avowed the design of *ultimately* occupying the valley of the Rio Grande as the western boundary of Texas; but Congress, by the joint resolution of annexation, had expressly disavowed the intention of involving the Government in such a movement. That resolution provided that the boundary between Mexico and Texas should be settled *by negotiation*, not by the partisan resolves of Mr. Polk and his Cabinet. It was binding upon the President and the country, and the violation of its provisions by the President was a flagrant and palpable dereliction of duty; and for such an act of usurpation and wrong, there is not found the slightest apology in what was set up in the original speech of the gentleman from Maryland, (Mr. McLANE,) nor were the inferences of that speech at all justified by the facts from which he had attempted to deduce them.

The whole point of controversy was a plain and simple one. Did Congress know, when the resolution to annex Texas was passed, that Gen. Taylor had been ordered to march to the Rio Grande? The gentleman from Maryland had said, in his first speech, that Congress did know that he "*had been assigned to the defence of the country west to the Rio Grande.*" How he could be "assigned to the defence" of the valley of the Rio Grande, and yet have no authority to march there with his army, I acknowledge my utter inability to comprehend. I supposed that the gentleman's language was capable of just the interpretation which I have given it, and still think that it is so. I do not know of any rule of interpretation other than that which gives to the gentleman's words the meaning I have attached to them; and, understanding them as I did when I made my

former speech, and as I still do, I then said, and again repeat, that no such information was communicated to Congress, either by the President or the Secretary of War. If it had been, then I agree that the act admitting Texas into this Union would have adopted the Rio Grande as the boundary, and there would have been no necessity for the subsequent order of the 13th of January, 1846. The issuance of that order by the President shows that he did not regard any previous one as giving Gen. Taylor authority to go beyond Corpus Christi, and the letters of Gen. Taylor show that he did not intend to go beyond there until positively ordered by the Government to do so. If left to himself, he never would have marched the army to the Rio Grande, but would have been content to guard what, at the time he marched to Corpus Christi, was understood and known to be the *western frontier* of Texas; just as he had formerly done our own frontier at the posts upon the southwestern border. But I do not care to press this part of the controversy further; I have already taken up more time with it than I had wished or designed.

The gentleman from Maryland has fallen into error as to what he supposed was my use of the words "*ultimate destination*," and has read from the annual report of the Secretary of War to show that no such words had been employed by him. I have already said that I had not designed to quote the words of the Secretary of War in that report. My object was merely to state the substance of what he had communicated to Congress. I know perfectly well that the term "*ultimate destination*" was first used by Mr. Bancroft in June, 1845, in his despatch from the War Department, and that this despatch was not communicated to Congress until after the war had commenced. It accompanied the war message of the President of the 11th of May, 1846; but although not employed in December, 1845, by the Secretary of War, it was perfectly apparent, from what he had said and what the President had said, that it was the design of the Administration that its ultimate policy would be the occupation of the valley of the Rio Grande. It was also apparent, from Gen. Taylor's letters, that he understood this design; yet, while all this was so, and the purpose of going to the Rio Grande was thus foreshadowed, it was, beyond question, true that Congress had no information that any steps *had then been taken* to execute this design. That being the case, any attempt to do so, with the resolution of annexation still in force, was a violation of the express terms of that resolution, and placed the President in the attitude of judging for himself what he should do, wholly irrespective of Congress and the people. As Congress determined that the question of boundary should be settled *by negotiation*, the President had no right to settle it in any other way, and it was a flagrant outrage upon the rights of the people when he usurped the power to determine where the boundary should be, and to maintain it by the sword. All that I have insisted on is, that the President had resolved that he would so maintain it at the time he communicated to Congress his message of December 18, 1845, but that he had not so declared this purpose as even to cause the suspicion, upon the part of any body not familiar with his Cabinet secrets, that he intended to move the army to the Rio Grande without the authority of law. Certainly he had made no effort to move it there until the order of 13th of January, 1846, and that order, issued when Congress was in session and without its knowledge, violated the act of annexation, the Constitution of the United States, and was an unprecedented assault upon the rights of the people.

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. McLANE) also stated on yesterday that I had fallen into error in regard to the extent of the county of San Patricio. I asserted that, before the independence of Texas, the county of San Patricio extended only to the Nueces river, but that afterwards it had been extended so as to embrace Corpus Christi. The gentleman said, on yesterday, that, by an act of the Texan legislature passed in 1842 or 1843, it was extended to the Rio

Grande. This was in confirmation of what I said. The point to which this county was extended, after Texan independence, was in no way material. The only question was, whether the revolutionary title of Texas extended beyond the Nueces. The fact now stated by the gentleman from Maryland proved that it did not extend beyond the Nueces. If it had, wherefore the necessity of passing an act of the Texan Congress to extend it beyond that point? The truth was, and the gentleman's argument yesterday was an admission of it, that Texas has no title beyond the Nueces except that which she has acquired since her revolution, by her own legislation. This is no title at all, as I have shown in my former speech; for Texas had never maintained jurisdiction beyond the settlements around Corpus Christi, except that jurisdiction which she had been able to maintain since the war began by the military power of this Government. Whatever rights thus acquired are the rights of a conqueror, under the law of nations, and subject to determination at the close of the war.

The gentleman from Maryland, passing to what he seemed to regard as the most important part of the controversy between us, has insisted with great earnestness that he was right in that position, in his first speech, wherein he charged that Gen. Taylor, in his letter of October 4, 1845, had advised the movement to the Rio Grand as a measure of political and diplomatic policy. I intend to have no quarrel with the gentleman as to the meaning either of the term *political* or *diplomatic*; but I did before, and now do again, and shall hereafter repeat it, if it become necessary, take issue with him on the point whether or not Gen. Taylor did intend to make a *political* recommendation to the Administration. I confidently appeal to the often-expressed opinion of Gen. Taylor on that subject, and am fully prepared to maintain, as I have before done, from those expressed opinions, that he never intended to make, and never did make, any recommendation of a *political* character to this Government. Every word that he said had exclusive reference to what he understood to be the fixed policy of the Administration, whose orders he, as a military commander, was bound to obey. What did he, or could he, know of the secret designs of Mr. Polk and his Cabinet? And if he had known them, what sympathies had he with them, or those who cherished them? Did he participate with Mr. Polk in the wish to engulf the whole of Mexico, or to wrest from it any portion of its territory? Was he so fond of war that he thirsted for Mexican blood? Did he know the true nature of our relations with Mexico? Had he been informed of the instructions to Mr. Slidell, which the President now refuses to communicate to us, the representatives of the people? Gen. Taylor's whole life, and all that he has written and said on the subject of this war, prove beyond controversy that he took no part in the Presidential counsels, and that he had no intention of advising the movements of the Administration. It was wholly out of his line of duty to do so. As a military commander, he had nothing to do with the Government policy of settling boundary lines or acquiring territory. His duty required him to defend the country to its just and true limits, and to go beyond those limits only in the event of being ordered to do so by the superior power of the Government. He did go, not pursuant to any political or diplomatic policy which he had recommended, but in subordination to the President of the United States, who, as commander-in-chief of the army, had ordered him to do so.

If the order of the 13th of January, 1846, were a rightful order; if it were given according to law and the constitution; if the public interest required that it should be issued; and if it were necessary to the maintenance of the honor or the rights of the country, why is it that the gentleman from Maryland, and other defenders of the President, labor so hard to relieve the President from the responsibility of issuing it, and to place it upon the old hero of Buena Vista and Monterey? If there is so much patriotism in the advocacy of the war and

its continuance until Mexico is entirely subdued, why are the President and his friends so desirous to shrink from the honor of having brought it on? That is, I can assure the gentleman, not the way in which Gen. Taylor does his work. It is his rule to "ask no favors and shrink from no responsibility;" and I think, that by firmly maintaining this rule of conduct, as I believe he will, he will yet express himself so fully in regard to this war, that there will be no mistaking his sentiments. Gentlemen here will find themselves wholly unable to persuade the country that *he brought on the war*. The mind of the country is already made up on that question; and, being made up, it is convinced of the unkindness with which the gentlemen are here treating General Taylor by insisting that he was the cause of the war, when they know full well that he only marched from Corpus Christi when ordered to do so by the President, and declared to the Administration that he would not march until he was so ordered.

I do not perceive the present importance of it, but the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. McLEAN) also asserted on yesterday, that, while General Taylor was in Louisiana, he was ordered not to march into Texas before her annexation was consummated. I could scarcely refrain from smiling when I heard the gentleman make this remark.

Mr. McLANE. I did not say before her annexation was *consummated*, but before the people of Texas had given their assent to the terms of annexation proposed to them.

Mr. THOMPSON. I confess that I have not sufficient acuteness of discrimination to understand the difference between that acceptance and actual annexation. Whenever Texas accepted the terms of our joint resolution, she became to all intents and purposes as much a part of this country as she is now; and the President was just as much bound to defend her to her true limits after that was done, as he was after she was admitted as a State into the Union.

General Taylor was ordered by Mr. Donelson, on the 28th of June, 1845, to march into Texas, and take position at Corpus Christi. Now, I would thank the gentleman to tell me how this order of the 28th June could have reference to a contingency that must depend on a popular act, afterwards to be performed? Texas did not consent to come into this Union until that consent was given by her convention, which met on the 4th of July, 1845. General Taylor was instructed to march into Texas *before* that acceptance. The order to march there was given pursuant to the instructions of this Government. It was therefore true, beyond question, that there was a hot haste about this thing which has plunged the nation into all its present difficulties.

I will now proceed to notice that part of the gentleman's speech which had reference to collection districts in Texas; upon the facts in regard to which the gentleman from Maryland and myself are at issue. That gentleman had at first said that Texas had, by an act of Congress, been divided into *two* collection districts, the western boundary of one of which was the Rio Grande. I have, on the other hand, shown, by the law itself, that the whole State of Texas constituted but one collection district, of which Corpus Christi was the extreme western limit. After my former speech was made, I looked into the reports from the Treasury Department, examined the Blue Book, and every other source of information upon which I could lay my hands, and have been unable to find any other reference to this district than that which I made in my speech and in the note attached to it. No where in any public document, or in any book, could I find the appointment of an inspector of customs at Point Isabel. I therefore stated that no such officer had ever been appointed. What the Administration may or may not have done since the war began, has nothing to do with the question; for it has now appointed officers of the customs in many of the ports of Mexico. These appointments are made by virtue of rights claimed by the

President as a military conqueror. But there is no *public* record of any *civil* appointment of an inspector at Point Isabel, made either before or since the war began. I have, at all events, searched for, and have been unable to find, any such; and I do not believe that any such can be found. I had heard, some time ago, that there was a *military* inspector of customs at Point Isabel, but no such *civil* officer of this Government there. I do not know how the fact is; but I do know, that if the President or the Secretary of the Treasury has appointed such a civil officer there, it has been done without authority of law, as it is not within any collection district of the United States. And I also know that, if such appointment has been made, no report of it has been made heretofore to Congress or the country. It has never been officially communicated, nor have I, or the House, or the country, received any public notice thereof, until the gentleman from Maryland read some letters here on yesterday, which he had obtained at the office of the Secretary of the Treasury. There is something very singular, to my mind, about this mode of conducting public business, but it seems to be a favorite mode with this Administration. When I spoke, in my former speech, of the order to General Taylor to march to the Rio Grande having been given before the President knew that Mr. Slidell was rejected, I was told by the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. RHETT) that the fact of Mr. Slidell's rejection was communicated to the Government in a paper which had not yet, even to the present day, been made public. I then asked the gentleman from South Carolina where he had procured a sight of that paper, and his response was, that he had seen it, but a day or two before, in the Department of War.

I repeat, that it is a most singular mode of proceeding that the Government should have certain documents, which ought to be public, reserved only for the sight of the friends of the Administration, when nobody else know their contents, to be used here just as the occasion may require. That is precisely the character of the information yesterday communicated by the gentleman from Maryland in relation to an inspector at Point Isabel. But, notwithstanding it was thus, for the first time, made public, it proved nothing more than what I have already said—that this inspector was a *military* officer. The letter from the Collector at Galveston to the Secretary of the Treasury, which the gentleman had read, was dated February 9, 1846—*more than one month after General Taylor was ordered to the Rio Grande*. His letter recommended an inspector to be appointed at Point Isabel, and gave as a reason therefor that he had been “advised that the United States forces now [then] stationed at Corpus Christi are [were] under orders to remove” there. This shows that the necessity of this appointment was occasioned by the movements of the army, and that the appointment was a military one. Under this recommendation, it was made by the Secretary of the Treasury, on the 9th of March, 1846, nearly *two months after* General Taylor had been ordered to the Rio Grande. Here, then, was a solution of the whole matter. The inspector was a military officer, not responsible to any law of the United States, but alone to the President and the Secretary of the Treasury. I have no doubt that, if the whole truth could be got at, it would turn out that, at this day, the customs were collected there under the military orders in council and the tariff of duties which the President and his Secretaries had caused to be issued. By the same authority they had appointed collectors and inspectors at Vera Cruz and Tampico.

Mr. McLANE. I will state to the committee and to the gentleman from Indiana, who seems to have forgotten what the law of the land is about inspectors of customs, that the laws of the United States require the collector of a district to nominate the inspector, and that he shall be confirmed by the Secretary of the Treasury. That is a civil office, known to the laws of the land;

and that civil officer is at Point Isabel. But no such civil officers are at Vera Cruz and Tampico; they are military officers.

Mr. THOMPSON. I presume I know perhaps as well as the gentleman himself does, that, by the acts of Congress of 1799 and 1804, the power to appoint inspectors was given to the Secretary of the Treasury, upon the nomination of the collector. But that does not in any manner change the question. This is a question of power. Had either the President or his Secretary of the Treasury the power to act in defiance of an act of Congress, which pointed out where these officers should be located, and appoint an officer beyond the limits fixed by law? Had either the President or his "Chancellor of the Exchequer" the civil power to act upon the nomination of an inspector from a collector at Monterey, on the Pacific? Or could they, by virtue of any civil authority, order an officer of the United States to reside there? I repeat, that the whole question is one of power. Neither the President nor the Secretary of the Treasury had the power; they acted alone under military authority.

I think I have now shown the committee and the gentleman from Maryland that, so far from weakening any position which has been taken by me in my original speech, every single one has been strengthened and fortified by the argument of the gentleman on yesterday. That which the gentleman seemed to consider the most important difference between us could not now but be fully understood—I mean the appointment of inspector at Point Isabel. I will repeat, that there may be no mistake as to my position, that if the Secretary of the Treasury, by virtue of the military power given him by the President, has thought proper to appoint such an officer, it has been done in defiance of law, and the country has had no information of it in any part of the public history, until it was furnished to the gentleman from Maryland in a private letter from the Secretary of the Treasury.

Mr. McLANE. Private?

Mr. THOMPSON. I mean a letter addressed to the gentleman as a member of this House.

Mr. McLANE. It is a copy from the record.

Mr. THOMPSON. It is a copy from a record of which neither this House nor the country had any information whatsoever, until it was brought here by the gentleman himself, and read in his speech on yesterday. It was furnished him privately by the Secretary of the Treasury to defend the Administration against the charge of violating a law of Congress. But I will not dwell longer upon this question. I wish, before I sit down, to notice another part of the gentleman's speech, which was not a reply to any of the arguments of my former one.

The gentleman seemed to be very anxious to place me before the country, not only as a Whig, but as a Clay Whig, or a Taylor Whig. I believe he has not been able to settle, in his own mind, to which class I belong. Now, the gentleman represented me correctly in calling me a "*whole Whig*," for I profess to be a *whole Whig*. Still I am not here as the special defender either of Mr. Clay or Gen. Taylor; they need no defence from me. But I will take this occasion to say, that it does not become the gentleman from Maryland, nor his political friends, to exhibit so much anxiety to strike at the reputation of Gen. Taylor. The old warrior has been buffeted about quite enough by the Administration itself. Not only have they endeavored to shut his mouth when he has dared to express his opinions on the subject of the war, (as he did in his letter to Gen. Gaines,) by reviving an old and obsolete order of the War Department, but they have studiously endeavored to deprive him of his well-earned fame. Mr. Polk did not want to hear what he had to say on the *political* policy of the Government. The moment he undertook to say what, in his judgment, it should be, it was attempted to deprive him of the privilege

of writing a word to any body but the officers of the Government, who should expose to the public only that which the President chose to communicate to Congress. But that was not the true object of the hostility of the President to Gen. Taylor. He saw the possibility that Gen. Taylor might become a favorite with the people, and this was quite enough for him to know. From that hour the veteran soldier was destined to be sacrificed, if there was strength enough in the Presidential arm to do it. Accordingly, his force at Buena Vista was reduced to a mere handful of men; nearly all the regular soldiers whom he had tried in the valley of the Rio Grande and at Monterey were taken from him. He was left only in command of untried volunteers, who had never heard the report of a hostile gun, almost in the heart of Mexico, surrounded by embarrassments on every side, with the best appointed forces of Mexico in his front, commanded by the general who had been sent to Mexico by Mr. Polk, and who then had a force more than four times the number of his own. This was but a part of the policy of this Administration towards Gen. Taylor. But, thanks to him and his brave little army, he had alike foiled the puny efforts of a jealous Executive, and added new honors to his own name and fresh glory to his country.

I have a few words to say, before I sit down, about the extreme anxiety which the gentleman from Maryland has exhibited to place the Whig party in the awkward predicament of being greatly divided on a candidate for the Presidency. It is of very little importance to this country how I or the gentleman from Maryland intend to vote on the question of the Presidency. I will say to the honorable gentleman, however, that if he lays the flattering unction to his soul that the Whig party is as much divided as he has represented, he is vastly mistaken. There are a great many men in that party who are prepared, whenever the crisis may call for the surrender of individual preferences and feelings, to buckle on their armor in the common defence of the Constitution, and the rescue of the country from the fearful evils which beset it. We, it is true, for particular reasons, have individual preferences; but there is something in this great controversy higher than men—higher than the elevation of any particular candidate to the Presidency. The security, the salvation of the Constitution, is the great question to be tried. In a contest of this sort we are prepared to rear the old flag under which we have fought in former times, and do duty to the glorious Constitution of our fathers; and whether under the banner of Mr. Clay, who has long stood foremost among the most distinguished statesmen of our country, or whether under that of General Taylor, who has fought our battles and covered himself all over with glory—who “asks no favor and shrinks from no responsibility,” or whether under that of some of the other illustrious men who are scattered all over this Union, we will go into the contest as if animated by one spirit, and country. Does the gentleman suppose we have got nobody else but having but one common object—the enduring prosperity and happiness of our General Taylor and Mr. Clay? Let him look all over the Union, and we can point to those under whose banner the Whig party could rally with confidence. Massachusetts can boast her Webster, the able defender of the Constitution; Delaware, her Clayton; Pennsylvania, her Sergeant and Binney; New York, her Fillmore; Ohio, her McLean, Corwin, and Ewing; Kentucky, her Crittenden; Tennessee, her Bell; North Carolina, her Mangum and Badger; South Carolina, her Preston. These are all men whom Whigs delight to honor. And there are others scattered all over the country—not only in public but in private life—men far more distinguished for intellect and patriotism than he who now dispenses power at the other end of the avenue.

But the gentleman's own political friends, I understand, have a good many family quarrels, which may be rather more difficult to reconcile. I have un-

derstood that the gentleman who sits at the other end of the avenue has himself set up pretensions for re-election, but that a large portion of his friends were unwilling to make him their candidate for two prominent reasons: first, because he admitted Santa Anna into Mexico; and, second, because rumor, with her ten thousand tongues, says he has circumvented his cabinet by giving secret instructions to Trist when he had said publicly that had recalled him. Then, I understand, that a distinguished gentleman from Pennsylvania is sometimes talked of; but he is denounced here as having been an opposer of the last war. Then there is a distinguished Senator from Michigan who is an aspirant, yet it is hinted that he has been on both sides of the Wilmot proviso. There is also the honorable gentleman who is now second in office under the Government, whose name was associated with Mr. Polk's in the last canvass, but it is brought against him that he wrote the bill for the recharter of the United States Bank. Whenever that party shall have settled their differences—if they shall succeed in so doing—and have brought out their man, and put their harness on, let me tell them that every true and gallant Whig, whether under the banner of Mr. Clay or General Taylor, will be found prepared to do his duty manfully for the defence of the Constitution and the country. I am authorized to speak for none but myself; but the gentleman properly judged me when he said that I was a “*whole Whig*.” This need not be told to my constituents, or to those who know me. From my very boyhood I have tried to do service in that glorious cause. I am proud to be called a Whig. It is the highest title I wish to wear; and I now tell the gentleman—without telling him for whom I may go until the great voice of the party has spoken—that in this contest the candidate of the gentleman's party, whoever he may be, will find a competitor with whom he may expect to enter into no mean or childish contest.

MR. STANTON. I understand the gentleman from Indiana to refer to a rumor that the President had circumvented his cabinet by sending secret instructions to Mr. Trist. I desire to know whether I understand the honorable gentleman to make such a charge.

MR. THOMPSON. Not at all; certainly not. I know nothing at all of the secrets at the other end of the avenue. I have not even a personal acquaintance with the gentleman who occupies the Presidential chair; consequently, I could not know what were the secret purposes of his Administration. All I know about this matter is obtained from an article in the leading French paper of New York, which came to this city yesterday. I make no endorsement of the charge.

MR. STANTON. I have it within my knowledge to say that the statement is absolutely false.

MR. THOMPSON. I am glad to hear it, for the sake of the President of the United States. The honorable gentleman, then, does not know what are the secrets of the President!

MR. CHAIRMAN, what I have said to the honorable gentleman from Maryland has been prompted by no unkind feeling. There is merely a difference of interpretation—of construction—between the gentleman and myself. And, as such are the sentiments which I experience towards the gentleman from Maryland, that gentleman will permit me to offer to him a piece of friendly advice. I have had a little more experience as a member of this House than the gentleman has, and this experience has satisfied me that a member may not presume too much upon his reputation here. I will, therefore, say, with kindness, to the gentleman, that it would be well for us both to imitate the example of older and more experienced members, who do not speak so often as to wear out the patience of the House.

Whatever, sir, may be the verdict passed here upon the great questions of

controversy which excites the nation, the people of this country will investigate these questions for themselves. They will declare, by their own potential voice, what should be done. Gentlemen, I know, are in the habit of saying they can anticipate the result of the Presidential contest. I cannot. Would to God I could. When gentlemen on the other side shall have brought out a distinguished man of their party, and put him in nomination, and when the Whigs shall have done the same, no man can tell the result. I fear it; I fear it for the Constitution; I fear it for the country. All I can now say is, that every true-hearted patriot will do his duty to the Constitution, and leave the issue in the hands of the people and of God. I trust and hope that the public virtue of this country is not yet destroyed. I trust and hope that the strong arm of the Executive, exercised in defiance of popular judgment of the popular will, of the Constitution, and of the law, has not yet stricken down that attachment which the people have been accustomed to feel for the institutions of our country. I trust and believe that there is yet enough of public virtue left to defend the Constitution in its purity, and save it from ruin.

Where are we? Where do we stand? We may wrangle here as we please. We may enter into the arena of partisan discussion in this Hall, and divert our own minds and the minds of the people; but we are in the midst of a great crisis. What shall be done—is asked every where. We have been engaged in war—in a devastating and ruinous war—with a sister republic. We have now the flattering prospect of peace! What shall we do with that peace if we make peace? What will be the result of our acquisitions if we make acquisitions of territory? Who can tell? If we do not make peace, where are we to stop? Are we to go forward with our conquering arms, and overrun and subjugate the whole of Mexico, and the whole of this continent? We are told that the people of the northern States of Mexico, not embraced in the treaty, are petitioning for admission into this Union. It is known that a commissioner from Yucatan is asking the protection of the Government. Looking to South America, we see even there they are throwing themselves into the arms of this Administration for protection. The inhabitants of Venezuela ask shelter from us. Where are we to stop? I ask, in God's name, where are we to stop?

We have been plunged into this condition by the President of the United States, not by the people of the country. It has been done by the President, not under the recommendation of General Taylor, but under his own stern, stubborn, obstinate will. Where, I repeat, are we to stop? It is easy to plunge a country into war. A weak, ambitious, imbecile President, by a single stroke of the pen, may get us into a long, expensive, ruinous war; but it demands all the sagacity, all the wisdom, all the true-hearted patriotism of the country to get us out of it. The incendiary may set fire to our building, but it requires a multitude, with well-directed efforts, to extinguish it. The President may hurl his country almost over the precipice; but it requires all the patriotism of all our wisest and best statesmen to save it. I trust in God it will be saved. Our only reliance is on the public virtue of the nation. If that is not exercised, and exercised speedily, I cannot but foresee a dark and gloomy fate for the country.

